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Instigator in DVC plot pleads

State will consider new laws to ensure integrity of grades

By Matt Krupnick
STAFF WRITER

State lawmakers will consider new laws to prevent falsified grades at community colleges, they said Tuesday at a legislative hearing on the Diablo Valley College grade-changing scandal.

Meeting at Pleasant Hill City Hall, two members of the Assembly Select Committee on Community Colleges said they were not convinced DVC leaders

had taken the six-year-long scandal seriously enough.

The legislators were particularly upset that college district board members did not attend the special hearing and said they worried the scheme — which involved more than 50 students and 400 grades — would never have come to light had the Times not revealed it

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DAN ROSENSTRAUCH/STAFF
HELEN BENJAMIN, Contra Costa district chancellor, attends a legislative hearing Tuesday.

■ By accepting 15 felony counts in grade-changing scheme and helping prosecutors, man gets less jail time

By Matt Krupnick
STAFF WRITER

A Pittsburg man accused of masterminding much of the Diablo Valley College grade-changing scandal pleaded guilty Tuesday to 15 felony counts, opening the door for other pleas and charges against other suspects.

Julian Revilla, 26, appeared in Contra Costa Superior Court for the morning hearing, waving and smiling at his family as he entered the courtroom's holding cell in a yellow jail jumpsuit. Revilla, who was about to grad-

uate from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo when he was arrested in July, had been charged with 23 felony counts and faced nearly 18 years in prison.

Instead, he will spend eight more months in County Jail on the 15 convictions for computer fraud, but the deal allowed him to suspend a four-year state prison term in exchange for helping in the prosecution of others in the case. Revilla has been in custody for the two months since his arrest, in lieu of \$250,000 bail. Superior Court Judge Bessie

Grades *CC Times*

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in January.

"Right now, I'm not satisfied and I'm very disappointed," said Assemblywoman Mary Hayashi, D-Castro Valley, after the hearing, citing administrators' lackluster participation and board members' absences. Legislators will ask state auditors to investigate the district if administrators don't prove they have solved the problems, she said.

"The public doesn't trust the institution anymore," she said. "This is a serious issue."

Board President Jo Ann Cookman said later that her absence was due to a miscommunication, but that board members did not think they needed to attend.

"I just didn't see the need," Cookman said. "Sometimes they don't want board members there."

The panel was convened to hear how the scandal occurred and how other schools could avoid similar problems. With 34 current and former DVC students charged with felonies and as many as 21 others likely to be charged, the case has become one of the country's most serious cheating scandals.

Students used the altered transcripts — for which they paid several hundred dollars per changed grade — to transfer to universities around the state, prompting widespread concerns about the integrity of DVC



DAN ROSENSTRAUCH/STAFF
GARY FINCHER, former Diablo Valley Community College Admissions and Records director, speaks Tuesday during a hearing in Pleasant Hill about the Diablo Valley College grade-changing scandal.

grades. On Tuesday, legislators said the state community college chancellor's office should take more responsibility for computer security at California's 109 two-year schools.

Panelists said they would consider a law to limit access to grade-management computers. About 90 employees, including students, were authorized to change grades in the three-college Contra Costa district, far more than other college districts.

"It concerns me, to be honest,

that the chancellor's office is not more involved with the integrity of grades," said Assemblyman Mark DeSaulnier, D-Concord.

Community colleges rely heavily upon local control, the state chancellor's top lawyer, Executive Vice Chancellor Steve Bruckman, told the panel. And the state office already has "a full plate of responsibilities," he said.

But Bruckman also said the office would obey legislative directions.

"The chancellor's office will

comply with whatever they decide," he said after the hearing.

Legislators heard testimony from Helen Benjamin, chancellor of the Contra Costa Community College District, and former DVC President Diane Scott-Summers.

Both women left the hearing immediately after their testimony, which also rankled lawmakers.

Their brief testimony consisted largely of prewritten answers to lawmakers' questions and included some questionable

statements, including that no full-time employees were involved in the changed grades. Prosecutors have said they are pursuing felony charges against at least one man who was a permanent employee in the DVC records office.

Scott-Summers, who stepped down as interim president during the summer, said she was satisfied the college had handled the scandal properly.

"We have taken this investigation seriously and will continue to do so," she told the panel. "This incident does not define Diablo Valley College. The college will survive this incident and move forward."

Both Hayashi and DeSaulnier criticized administrators for keeping the investigation quiet for nearly a year, even as Contra Costa County voters approved a \$286.5 million bond measure to fund construction in the college district.

College leaders have said they were worried about compromising the investigation.

Transparency always is the best public policy for taxpayer-funded agencies, DeSaulnier said after the hearing.

"In government, honesty is our best offense," he said. "The public understands human frailties, but they don't understand a lack of transparency."

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